

COVID-19: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Rep. Gerry Connolly (VA-11)
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Can you explain the legislation that Congress has passed so far in response to COVID-19?

While much remains to be done, Congress has taken several critical steps in response to COVID-19.

First, early this month, we passed the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, an \$8.3 billion package aimed at preparing our health systems for the shock of a global pandemic. Our legislation, now law, provided:

- *\$2.2 billion for public health funding for prevention and preparedness, including \$950. for local and state health agencies.*
- *\$3 billion for research and development for vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics.*
- *\$1 billion for medical supplies and medical surge capacity.*
- *\$1.25 billion for overseas global health funding to combat COVID-19.*
- *\$300 million to facilitate fair and easy access to any eventual vaccine.*
- *\$7 billion in low-interest loans from the Small Business Administration.*

About a week later, we passed the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act*, which has now been signed into law. This legislation:

- *Ensures every American has access to free COVID-19 testing, including with \$1 billion in funding to reimburse uninsured individuals for the cost of testing.*
- *Provides emergency paid sick and family leave to employees sick with coronavirus and those who need to care for loved ones or dependents at home due illness or closed schools.*
- *Provides a massive infusion of federal funding into state unemployment insurance programs, extends the maximum duration an individual can receive benefits from 26 weeks to one year, and makes it easier and faster for individuals to qualify for benefits.*
- *Expands food security initiatives by providing an additional \$500 million to the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC), allocates \$400 million to assist local food banks trying to meet increased demand, and provides for the delivery of more than 25 million meals to low-income seniors.*

Why is there a shortage of Personal Protective Equipment, and what are we doing to keep our health care workers safe?

I am deeply concerned by shortages of the personal protective equipment (like masks, gloves, and gowns) that keep our frontline health workers safe.

While the COVID-19 outbreak in China depleted the global supply of PPE to an extent, the shortage is exacerbated by a surge in purchasing of masks and other PPE by non-health care professionals. In order to

preserve these supplies for the medical professionals who need them most, you should **ONLY** wear a mask if you feel sick. The CDC does not recommend the use of a mask if you are healthy.

The federal government has a responsibility to coordinate the distribution of PPE to states and localities that need them. President Trump signed an Executive Order in which he invoked the Defense Production Act, which would authorize his administration to utilize our vast domestic manufacturing capabilities to ramp up production of PPE. Unfortunately, the President has thus far refused to act on this authority, and his administration has not ordered any increased production of PPE.

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Operations, I joined the other Oversight Committee Chairs in requesting information and an urgent briefing from administration officials on the government's plans regarding production and distribution of PPE.

Crises like global pandemics require a whole of government response. I continue to hope the president will utilize every option available to him to combat the spread of this disease.

Why is the United States so far behind on testing for COVID-19, and what's being done to ensure tests are available for and accessible to all?

First, let me say that I share your outrage over the shortage of COVID-19 testing in this country. It is unacceptable for the richest country on earth to be so far behind the rest of the world in testing for COVID-19. That's why I supported the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201), which, thankfully, has been signed into law.

The bill provides free COVID-19 testing to people with private insurance; Medicaid, CHIP, and Medicare beneficiaries; veterans; federal employees; and servicemembers. It also made \$1 billion available to reimburse uninsured individuals for the cost of testing.

But let's get to the root of the problem. COVID-19 testing in the United States has faced several challenges that have led to severe delays. First, rather than utilizing the test distributed by the World Health Organization, the Administration decided to develop its own.

This decision gave rise to another major problem when, due to possible contamination during development, the CDC had to scrap the test and start all over again.

The Administration has repeatedly claimed that millions of tests would be made available. But that simply hasn't happened, even as other countries are conducting tens of thousands of tests per day.

We have already lost months of potential preparation time that we can never get back. We can't afford to lose any more.

As Chairman of the Government Operations Subcommittee:

- *I've asked the administration to provide key data on testing, diagnoses, and costs of treatment, and have requested they provide me with their plan to get us on the right track.*
- *I also wrote to President Trump directly to urge him to include our region as a priority location for federally-supported COVID-19 testing sites.*
- *I've urged HHS and the FDA to expedite regulatory guidance for new, simple tests that can easily be performed in the medical setting.*

- *And I have requested additional guidance from HHS and the FDA regarding the lab's ability to conduct tests and urged the streamlining of approval processes for new testing.*
- *I will continue to press this administration to do much more to ensure we can reliably detect, test, trace, quarantine, and treat individuals infected by COVID-19.*

What resources are available for small business owners and their employees?

Small businesses account for 93.4 percent of firms in the 11th District, employing 191,000 people -- nearly half of all workers in the district. Right now, they are being hit hard by the economic fallout from COVID-19, and they need support.

For small business workers, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act:

- *Creates emergency paid sick leave and paid family leave in the case of school closures for working families impacted by COVID-19.*
- *Requires employers with up to 500 employees provide two weeks (10 days) of paid sick leave and twelve weeks of paid family leave, and*
- *Provides a refundable payroll tax credit to employers to cover 100 percent of the cost of wages, and a refundable income tax credit for self-employed individuals.*
- *For small business owners, the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act included funding for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide approximately \$7 billion in disaster loans for small businesses.*

Virginia small businesses are eligible to receive these loans, which will be available for up to \$2 million and are low interest -- 3.75 percent for small businesses without credit available elsewhere, and 2.75 percent for non-profits.

If you are interested in applying for an SBA loan, please visit www.SBA.gov. You may also contact the SBA disaster assistance customer service center by calling 1-800-659-2955 or emailing disastercustomerservice@sba.gov.

This is a start, but I know we can do more. I am helping to lead an effort in Congress to provide small businesses with grants or interest free loans during this pandemic.